

A. PUBLIC INFORMATION MEETING NOTES

Norwottuck Rail Trail Rehabilitation October 29, 2008 Public Information Meeting Notes:

(compiled by R. Bergfors, 11/7/2008)

Date, Time and Location:

The Norwottuck Rail Trail Rehabilitation Public Information Meeting was held Wednesday, October 29, 2008 at the Hopkins Academy High School cafe/auditorium. The meeting began at 6:45pm and public comments wrapped up at 9:00pm. The room was set up by the school custodian, Stanley, with 200 chairs and tables along the sides of the room for display and sign-in. They also provided a podium with microphone and an additional microphone on a stand for the public. Stanley returned the room to normal set up for the cafeteria at the end of the meeting. The Town of Hadley did not charge for use of this space and it was a pleasure working with all town personnel involved.

Attendance:

Danny O'Brien and Robbin Bergfors presented from DCR. From Stantec Consulting, Inc, Ron Headrick, Bill Mertz, Nicole Sanford presented.

There were 48 attendees counted although the sign in sheet shows 45 names. There seemed to be a good cross section of the community with participants from the Universal access adaptive cycling program, a resident of the Green Leaves 55+ housing complex, bike commuters, walkers, abutting residents, owners of the Trailside bike shop, members of the environmental community.

In attendance from DCR were Gary Briere, Evelyn Jimenez, Joe Iagallo, Jennifer Soper, and Kathy Lowry. Other state personnel included Chunxia Feng (MHD) and Guy Bresnahan (EOT).

Elected officials were State Rep. John Scibak, Natalie Blais from Congressman Olver's office, and Jerry Devine (Chairman of the Hadley Board of Selectmen).

Members of the Norwottuck Rail Trail Advisory Committee present were Rob Kusner (Amherst), Fran Van Treese (Amherst), Andy Morris-Friedman (Hadley), and Frank Olbris (Northampton). Regular attendees of the NRTAC meetings who are not members included Lynn Grabowski and Jeff McCollough (Pioneer Valley Planning Commission).

Media Coverage:

CBS 3 – Springfield: camera man, Eric Mead, filmed a short interview with Danny O'Brien prior to the meeting and the beginning of the presentation. He did not stay for the public comment period. He said if the story aired, it would be on their 10pm or 11pm news that night as well as the 10pm internet broadcast. Robbin Bergfors checked cbs3tv.com the next morning and did not find the story on their web site.

Hampshire Gazette: a small announcement appeared on B4 and on their website. They did not send a reporter to cover the meeting.

Hadley Community Access TV (THa CAT): Andy Morris-Friedman, NRTAC member from Hadley, video recorded the entire meeting. He plans to get it aired on Hadley CATV and Northampton

CATV which has a sharing program with Hadley. He was concerned about the low lighting and whether the video would be too dark to air.

Meeting Format:

Danny O'Brien, DCR project manager, opened with an introduction and acknowledgements.

Robbin Bergfors, DCR co-project manager, gave an overview of the public outreach plan (script attached) including ways to contribute the night of the meeting as well as the project web page <http://www.mass.gov/dcr/projects/norwottuck/index.htm> and Pre-Design Trail User survey.

Ron Headrick, Stantec Project Manager, began the PowerPoint presentation (available on project web page. Bill Mertz presented engineering issues. Nicole Sanford presented environmental issues.

At the end of the PowerPoint presentation, Ron Headrick, provided a list of Guiding Components to organize comments into themes or broad categories as well as ground rules for commenting. The audience was encouraged to step up to the microphone and speak or drop written comments into the comment box provided. Comments were given by 17 local residents and Jerry Devine from the Town of Hadley BOS. The meeting was orderly and civil with many good insights and suggestions.

Public Comment Notes:

1. **Alexandra Dawson**, Chair of Hadley Conservation Commission and Hadley Resident. Ms. Dawson also provided a written statement that she brought with her and written comments on the sheet provided in the handout.
 - a. Widening – it's incredibly expensive, there are difficult barriers to overcome in widening to 10 ft. First, the rail road embankment is only 12 ft. wide. That is not enough room to include a shoulder. We can't simply pave to 10 ft. without providing shoulders for safety.
 - b. Wetland Issues – She didn't see any pink flags (wetland flagging placed by Stantec team in the spring during their wetland delineation). She was concerned about impacts to the swamp between East St. and Spruce Hill Road. It is a major swamp. She noted that the swamp would impact the ability to reduce the slope of the access path to/from Spruce Hill Road.
 - c. Tunnels and Bridges – the interior width of existing structures is not 10 ft. It will be too costly to widen these structures to 10 ft.
 - d. Removal of trees – there are a lot of black locust in the Hadley section. She also sees trees other than black locust that are causing root damage. Requested that all trees planned for removal are marked in the field (for their scrutiny) before cutting. Robbin Bergfors noted that DCR did this on the CCRT. MHD will manage this project, but DCR will make every effort to bring the same sensitivity to tree removals.
 - e. Bizarre ROW variability – we can't assume that certain trees are in the DCR ROW without verifying the right-of-way line in specific areas.
 - f. Middle Street – needs cross walk marking AS SOON AS POSSIBLE, don't wait for construction.
 - g. Protecting wildlife – remember the birds and wildlife and their habitat. Tree corridors such as the Hadley portion of the Norwottuck, are important wildlife habitat.

2. **Susie Woods**, Hadley resident. Owns and formerly lived at 70 Russell Street (Rt 9) abutting rail trail and adjacent to O'Connell's Convenience Plus at 73 Russell St. Also, provided written comments on the sheet provided.

- a. Safety on West Street – people leave their bikes on her lawn and walk down West Street to cross over to the Esselon Café on the other side of Route 9. She is very worried about potential accidents. Doesn't seem to mind that people leave their bikes on her lawn but requested a bike rack at the West Street intersection.
- b. Invasive plants – glad we're getting rid of bittersweet; can we get rid of poison ivy, too? She's very susceptible to getting poison ivy.
- c. Not enough parking and public access – people park at O'Connell's Convenience Plus/Shell Gas Station and walk through her yard at 70 Russell St. She does not appreciate this intrusion.

3. **Beverly Weeks**, Green Leaves Housing Community, Amherst, MA

The Greenleaves complex is a 55+ housing community with approximately 200 residents.

- a. Safety – many residents of the housing complex are intimidated by cyclists and won't walk on the trail. She recommended that we post signs reminding cyclists to call out "passing on the left" to warn pedestrians that they are coming up from behind.
- b. Access – requested better access from the housing complex to the paved trail. Now access is a foot path through the woods. Need signage marking the access for folks who are easily disoriented, such as on-set of dementia.
- c. Robbin Bergfors asked if she could generalize the distance that most residents would walk along the trail. Beverly estimated that some walk ¼ mile and others walk 1-2 miles. She walks several miles at a time.

Note: Ms Weeks also emailed written comments on Nov. 2, 2008. See attached with other written comments.

4. **Michele Morris-Friedman**, Resident of Hadley and wife of Andy Morris-Friedman, member of NRTAC.

- a. Accessibility – she helps people participating in the UA program adaptive cycling or others who have disabilities. Accessibility from the parking lots at Trailside Bike Shop is up a difficult slope with no ramps. Need turn-around areas in vicinity of Trailside Bike Shop for tandems bikes.
- b. Stated that she has mixed feelings overall about a new path, but didn't offer any specific reservations.
- c. Signage – when crossing Damon Road west towards Northampton. Suggested maps and distance to Northampton.

5. **Melinda Nielsen**, bike commuter to Northampton.

- a. Safety – She realizes this concern is outside the scope of work, but the biggest safety issue is the crossing from Woodmont Rd to King St.
- b. Trail width – the greatest pleasure for her is riding alongside a companion on the trail and she would appreciate a wider paved surface.

6. Bob Aronson, Northampton resident.

- a. Design standards – how often do they change? D O'Brien responded: AASHTO provides guidelines that change every 10 years or so. A revised version of the AASHTO guidelines is due out next summer.
- b. Safety – he is never comfortable at the blind turn on the west side of the Rt. 9 tunnel.
- c. Parking – need spill over parking instructions at the Damon Road Parking lot. Can we direct people to the Northampton Park & Ride lot? There is currently a sign that directs people to the "Bread & Circus" parking lot, but no directions and that store is now a Whole Foods.
- d. Rollerbladers – they are the most hazardous users, travel at the highest speed, are most erratic and have the greatest chance of falling. He didn't offer any suggestions.
- e. Safety – suggested that we establish a statistical basis for looking at hazards such as accident and police reports. Advised that Maple Street is one location we really need to look at.

7. Bob Adams, Northampton Resident. Participant in UA program, uses hand cycles.

- a. Safety – cracks and drop-offs at edge of pavement are treacherous. Need fencing at tops of steep slopes especially at Snell Street.

8. Female Amherst resident. (maybe Sara Langseth, light brown hair in corn-rows) Bike commuter to Northampton.

- a. Construction – during construction can we provide "share the road" signs for on-road traveling?
- b. Snowplowing – can we plow ½ the trail to allow for winter sports and bike commuting? Danny O'Brien responded: it is not DCR policy to plow its rail trails in order to allow for a variety of winter sports. However, we do plow the Damon Road and Station Rd. parking lots. There are also other concerns associated with plowing such as black ice and sanding. Sand accumulation impacts wetlands along the trail.

9. Jerry Devine, Chairman of the Hadley Board of Selectmen.

- a. BOS is seeking the Governor's support for their dyke project at the north end of town. The BOS sent a letter to Governor Patrick stating that they are trying to care for all of their assets including the rail trail and are looking for support on their dyke project.
- b. Trail width –realizes there are conflicts between bike and pedestrian users, especially commuters. BOS supports widening the trail to 10 ft. to reduce conflicts.
- c. The Town of Hadley will be celebrating its 350th Anniversary next year with events on the Common. Anything they can do to help with coordinating trail events or closures?

10. Lynn Grabowski, regular attendee of the NRTAC meetings. Bike Commuter.

- a. Please install portable toilets at Station Road. DCR has UA portable toilets at Mt Tom but there isn't access there. Joe Iagallo responded: he doesn't know if DCR ever provided toilets at Station Road. The units at Damon Road are provided by UMASS for the rowers.
- b. Trash – she realizes that DCR has a carry in/carry out policy, but we need trash receptacles in the Damon Road and Station Road parking lots. There is a lot of trash at the Amherst end of the trail.

- c. Safety – at the Damon Road parking lot there is a convergence of 3 paths; people coming off the bridge, entering the trail from the parking lot and coming from the Damon Road intersection. It is especially bad at night. Ron Headrick responded: we are looking at making a turn around there for west bound trail traffic.
- d. Requested lighting on the CT River Bridge and at the convergence of the paths. DCR has lights in the parking lot at the Notch but its rarely used at night.
- e. There are steep embankments at the sides of the CT River Bridge that need protections. She once saw a toddler almost fall down the steep slope.
- f. Parking at Damon Road – the rules governing parking are not clear. People are getting parking tickets because they don't know when its ok to park. People park there for commuting (she wasn't clear on whether they are using the parking lot as a park and ride or for bike commuting).

11. **Lola Reid**, Northampton. She has been using the trail for bike commuting since it opened.

- a. She's excited about the project and replacement of the paving. Recently she got a flat tire with a load of groceries.
- b. Construction Schedule: when and how long? She "isn't getting any younger". Ron Headrick responded: he doesn't like to put anything in print that he isn't sure he can deliver. The MHD process will determine the construction schedule. However, we are trying for late next year.

12. **Brandon McPhail**, Northampton. Bike commuter to UMass.

- a. Have we considered ambulance access for emergency response? He has seen an ambulance trying to access the trail at the Swift connector to help a person who went off the trail. Danny O'Brien responded: 10 ft is needed to accommodate vehicles without damaging the edge of pavement.
- b. The difficult part of his trip is crossing King Street. The second most difficult part is crossing Damon Road. All cars are not recognizing the red light; many cars run the light without stopping. There is a lot of confusion at the intersection. Suggested we make it appear more like a typical intersection with more visual cues on the approach. Compared it to the Rt. 116 signal with initial strobe red which has better visual cues.
- c. Encouraged additional access to destinations along the trail; that adds to the practical value of the trail if there is access to shopping, etc. Did not suggest specific points.

13. **Lynn Smith**, Belchertown. Bike Commuter on trail since 1993.

- a. Safety – access onto the trail from Maple Street is very difficult because of high traffic and no shoulder. It's difficult to make the turn onto the trail. (Marvin Ward spoke up that he too is very concerned about this intersection).
- b. Concerned that use of splitter islands will make the trail narrower at intersections. Robbin Bergfors responded: the trail widens at intersections to accommodate the width of the splitter islands. The travel lanes remain the same width.
- c. Route 9 tunnel – she doesn't see it as a major problem. The limited sight distance is obvious. She would rather see the money that will be required for this item go to other aspects of the project.
- d. Communication during construction. For bike commuters, they never want to ride the trail to find it closed and then need to back track. We need better closure

communications so people can plan their trip. Prior to the meeting Ms. Smith spoke with Robbin Bergfors about the trail closures made in spring 2008 for interim repairs. The portable message boards provided a phone number but it didn't connect to a person. She only got a recorded message. She suggested that the boards provide a number at DCR that directs callers to a person who can answer questions.

14. **Leonard Gnatek**, Hadley resident. Walker/wildlife watcher.

- a. Urged that we provide a yellow center line so people don't use the whole path. This started a discussion on the yellow line. Danny O'Brien asked for a show of hands for the yellow line; there appeared to be affirmative consensus with no opposition. Dorothy Baumann of Trailside Bikes/bike commuter said the line would help in poor light conditions. Alexandra Dawson supported the line and said it's easier for parents to direct kids to stay on the right side if they have the yellow line. It provides a recognizable boundary.
- b. Parking – suggested that people should be able to park at the Juvenile court parking lot in Hadley.
- c. Observations – he sees a lot of wildlife along the trail (beaver, deer, moose, quail, etc.) and many people visiting from out of state use the trail. Dorothy Baumann also commented to Robbin Bergfors that she gets a lot of rentals from parents visiting their college kids. The speed of the users going through the Route 9 tunnel (without courtesy) creates the safety issue.

15. **Tim Coppolo**, Amherst resident.

- a. Beaver Pond area – people need a wayside to get off the trail for observation. He's seen professional photographers set up their tripods right in the middle of the trail. Ron Headrick responded: we're looking at several interpretive areas for pull off's including the beaver pond area.

16. **Marilyn Billings**, Amherst resident with Tim Coppolo.

- a. Safety/access – they access the trail from the Amherst Conservation area by Southeast Street. It is difficult access because of a weird angle.
- b. Parking – suggested the county jail parking lot for over flow parking.

17. **Frank Olbris**, Northampton resident and representative on the NRTAC.

- a. No rumble strips.
- b. He attended a conference at the University a couple of decades ago. The speaker talked about various widths of paths and advised against the "highway mentality" in making it consistently wide. She suggested varied widths depending on the use at certain locations along the trail. Make high traffic areas wider than simple travel ways. Frank has biked in Chicago on a path that has highlighted intersections or points of interest on the trail with large concrete circles in a change of color and pavement (white round concrete in contrast to the asphalt trail). Frank recommended variability of width depending on the intensity of use and variations in path with visual cues at points of decision or gathering. Ron Headrick noted a possible concern with differential settlement (bituminous and cement concrete) but concurred with the contrasting queues at decision points.

18. **Bob Aronson** (repeat)

- a. Safety - For emergency response, how do people identify their location without frequent street crossings or mile markers? Can we incorporate signage or gps coordinates for emergency response? Note from Robbin Bergfors: we need to label the bridges in addition to streets especially at the Amherst end where there are very few street crossings.

Additional notes from Robbin Bergfors:

1. Media Coverage:
 - a. cbs3TV: Cameraman, Eric Mead, filmed a short interview with Danny O'Brien and the beginning of the presentation. He did not stay for the public comment period. If aired, the story would appear on their 10pm or 11pm news. It did not appear on their website for the 10pm news.
 - b. Hampshire Gazette printed a brief announcement on page B4 the day of the meeting. A reporter did not cover the meeting.
 - c. Hadley local access TV – Andy Morris-Friedman, NRTAC – Hadley representative video recorded the entire meeting. If the lighting is not too dark, he intends to broadcast the meeting on Hadley and Northampton local access TV.
2. Conversation with Dorothy Baumann, owner of Trailside Bike Shop, before presentation began.
 - a. Trailside Bicycles bought the business 2 years ago. They have winterized their building but don't have enough cold weather business to stay open all winter long. Around this time of year (end of October), they are opened Thursday afternoons for people to bike after work through Sunday for rentals and repairs. They may close for the winter after the holidays.

Notes received from Stantec Consulting, Inc. on 10/31/2008

Aerial Photo “Post-it-note” comments (written west to east)

POST-IT-NOTE	Apparent Location Reference
<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Would low-impact solar lighting work here?	Points to area between Bates Street and Damon Road.
<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Put lights on underside of I-91 bridge over rail trail (with light sensors to turn them on – evening riders caught in dark) shut off at 10 pm or so	Points to I-91 underpass.
<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Provide access to Conn. River between bike path and Coolidge bridge – for swimming	Points to east side of Connecticut River between bridges.
<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Please install parking lot here, which is state owned land	Points to southwest corner of Rte. 9 and Cross Path Road.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 70 Russell – people park at carwash and walk through my yard to path 	Refers to home at 70 Russell Street.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1)* bike racks needed, 2) communicate availability of courthouse parking lot if needed if indeed it is avail. 	Points to southwest corner of West Street crossing.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Bike racks needed 	Points to northeast corner of West Street crossing.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Poison ivy between West St. & East St. 	Refers to area between West Street and East Street.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improve access to trail, especially for participants of Universal Access program 	Points to Trailside bike shop.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Worst roots on the trail 	Points to area just west of Spruce Hill Road
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1) straighten out tunnel under Rt. 9, 2) not worth the cost – people can slow down this one time 	Points to west side of Rte. 9 tunnel.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1) access to trail from Maple St., 2) Yes! 	Points to path intersection with Maple Street.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1) access to mall, 2) Yes! 	Points to area behind Hampshire Mall.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1) access to Green Leaves, 2) Yes! 	Points to cattle pass at Hadley/Amherst line. [Green Leaves is 55+ housing development to north of trail]
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide bigger paved area at UMASS extension/bike path intersection – to allow greater turning radius 	Points to juncture of NWRT and Swift Connector.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There is an informal path that runs from Swift way to Snell St. Snell St. needs a crossing 	Points to Swift Connector.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Drainage here really bad this year. Suspect issues w/ Amh College field construction 	Points to area west of South Pleasant Street.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Help! Can we survive the angled plywood patch on the bridge for 2+ more years? 	Points between Fort River Bridge and Southeast Street bridge. Refers to one or both?

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Pave access on east side Southeast St. (especially treacherous in fall w/ leaves) 	Points to Southeast Street crossing.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Central Vermont RR 	Points to Pan Am Railway. Author verbally indicated that Pan Am does not own the line.

* Note: number 1) refers to original author comment, 2) refers to added comment by second author.